

December 2018

Frank W. Nelte

HARDEN NOT YOUR HEART

In my recent article entitled "DID GOD HARDEN PHARAOH'S HEART?" I examined all the Scriptures in the Book of Exodus that in our English translations say that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Specifically, I examined the three different Old Testament Hebrew words which are all at times translated into English as "harden".

The question was not whether or not Pharaoh's heart was hard. It was hard and cruel, as proved, amongst other things, by Pharaoh's command to make the work of the Israelites even harder (see Exodus 5:5-19, etc.). The only question was: had God actively done something to cause Pharaoh to harden his heart, or was that hardening entirely Pharaoh's own doing?

I showed that two of those three Hebrew words don't really apply to hearts being "hardened", and that there are also some significant mistranslations in the verses involved. The claim that those two Hebrew words supposedly mean "to harden" has rather deviously come into our English Bibles from the Greek LXX Old Testament, by way of the Latin Vulgate Version.

The upshot of that examination was the realization that God Himself did not actually "harden Pharaoh's heart". The hardening of Pharaoh's heart was something that Pharaoh himself did, though Satan and his demons assuredly pressured Pharaoh's mind towards that end. That previous article discusses this question in more detail.

However, I did point out that one of the three Hebrew words used in reference to Pharaoh does have the meaning "to harden". The Hebrew verb "qashah" is used 28 times in the Old Testament, and out of those occurrences it is appropriately translated 20 times as "harden, hard, stiff-necked, grievous", with various miscellaneous other translations for the remaining 8 verses.

THE HEBREW VERB "QASHAH"

Let's look at a few of the verses where the Hebrew verb "qashah" is used. This will give us a range of applications for **what it means "to be hard-hearted"**.

Referring to his two sons Simeon and Levi, Jacob on his deathbed said:

Cursed *be* their anger, for *it* was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel (qashah): I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel. (Genesis 49:7)

In this verse, in reference to the wrath of Simeon and Levi, instead of translating "qashah" as "was hard", the translators opted to say that their wrath "was cruel". And that is certainly an acceptable translation. A hard heart is also a cruel heart. Simeon and Levi had become mass murderers, clear evidence of their hard hearts. And their father Jacob didn't mince words when talking about this.

Now let's consider something Moses told the Israelites shortly before they entered the Promised Land. In Deuteronomy chapter 10 Moses first explained the way we are to live our lives before God.

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but **to fear** the LORD your God, **to walk** in all his ways, and **to love** him, and **to serve** the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, **to keep** the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command you this day for your good? (Deuteronomy 10:12-13)

Having told the people what they must do, Moses then addressed what they were not to do.

Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and **be no more stiff-necked** (qashah). (Deuteronomy 10:16)

Here "qashah" is translated as "stiff-necked". To harden our hearts is to become stiff-necked. The word stiff-necked conveys an attitude of **resisting teaching, instruction and correction**. A stiff-necked person is a self-willed person who is not willing to listen to reason.

Let's also notice what the people of Israel said to Solomon's son Rehoboam.

Your father **made our yoke grievous** (qashah): now therefore make you **the grievous** (qasheh) **service** of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve you. (1 Kings 12:4)

(Comment: "Qashah" is the verb and "qasheh" is the adjective. But these Hebrew words convey the same meaning.)

After Solomon had died, the people of Israel said that Solomon had treated the whole nation in **a very hard-hearted and cruel way**. In his later years Solomon had ruled **very selfishly**, and as a result the people of Israel had suffered under his rule.

Let's next consider the Northern Kingdom of Israel at the time when God sent them into Assyrian captivity. Here is what God tells us.

Yet **the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers**, saying, Turn you from your evil ways, and keep my commandments *and* my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. Notwithstanding **they would not hear**, but **hardened** (qashah) **their necks**, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God. (2 Kings 17:13-14)

The people of Israel hardened their hearts against God. They **deliberately rejected God's laws** and God's ways in favor of pagan customs and traditions. And so eventually God sent them away.

Until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day. (2 Kings 17:23)

That was when God "divorced" the northern ten tribes of Israel. "Sending the wife away" was the sign of "divorcement" (see Deuteronomy 24:1). That is why God sent Israel out of the land that belonged to God ... **the captivity of Israel finalized and recognized Israel's divorce from God.**

The reason for why God "divorced" Israel is that the people of Israel had hardened their hearts towards God. **It had not been a happy marriage**. And the most significant symptom of their hardened hearts was their rejection of God's laws and God's ways. Their disobedience was proof that **they had hardened their hearts** (i.e. their attitude) towards God.

Now let's look at something David had said in Psalm 95.

Harden not your heart (qashah), as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: (Psalm 95:8)

This is the statement that the Apostle Paul quotes in Hebrews. We'll look at the New Testament later. But here we have another very clear instruction which says: don't do that! Don't harden your heart. For us to harden our hearts is always **a provocative action** towards God. **To harden our hearts is to challenge God, daring and provoking God to respond.** And when God does respond to our provocative challenge, by meting out some punishment, then we usually feel sorry for ourselves.

To harden our hearts is quite possibly the single most dangerous attitude any human being could ever adopt!

It is an attitude that says: I'm right and God is wrong. It's the attitude Jonah had when God asked Jonah "do you do well to be angry ...?", and Jonah replied "(yes) I do well to be angry, even unto death" (see Jonah 4:9). Jonah was arguing with God and disagreeing with God. **Jonah had very firmly hardened his heart**, and he was bitter, which is a very sad ending for the Book of Jonah. Now can we grasp how enormously dangerous it is for us to ever harden our hearts? And so David exhorts us in Psalm 95 with "harden not your heart".

Let's look at the circumstances David had in mind when he made this statement.

The people of Israel tempted God from the day God brought them out of Egypt. That provocation continued throughout their history. As God said:

Forty years long was I grieved with *this* generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: (Psalm 95:10)

When towards the end of the first year it was time for Israel to enter the Promised Land, Moses had sent out 12 spies to scout out the land. After the spies had returned, 10 spies gave a bad report that made the people fearful, and then the people rebelled against God. God then said to Moses:

And the LORD said unto Moses, **How long will this people provoke me?** and how long will it be before they believe me, for all the signs which I have showed among them? (Numbers 14:11)

The people of Israel had once again hardened their hearts, and that amounted to provoking God. So God said:

I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of you a greater nation and mightier than they. (Numbers 14:12)

Moses interceded for the people of Israel, and God pardoned their sins according to Moses' request (Numbers 14:20). But God also decided that none of the adults would enter into the Promised Land; they would wander in the wilderness for 40 years, and die during those 40 years. In that context God then said:

Because **all those men** which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and **have tempted me now these ten times**, and have not hearkened to my voice; (Numbers 14:22)

After the exodus in the first year alone the people had tempted God "ten times". And those temptations then continued for another 40 years in the wilderness ... that's what we saw in Psalm 95:10.

Add it all up! Ten provocations in just the first year. Then it was approximately another 750 years until God finally "divorced" the Northern Ten-Tribe Kingdom of Israel. So when they then went into national captivity, by then **the people of Israel had provoked God hundreds upon hundreds of times!** And after that, the Kingdom of Judah turned out to be **even "more corrupt"** than her northern sister "Aholah" (see Ezekiel 23:11).

Let's briefly go back and notice something God had said in verse 12.

I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of you a greater nation and mightier than they. (Numbers 14:12)

Notice God's threat here that states: "I will disinherit them"! We usually just gloss over this statement. But this is a very sobering threat! Let's understand something: **people who are "disinherited" never accept that fact!**

It doesn't matter whether it is the child of a very wealthy person, or whether it is a politician who feels entitled to a specific position, or whether it is a member of some royalty, or whether it is the heir-apparent to a large industrial empire. **When such people are disinherited they never accept that!** They go to their graves feeling that they were cheated out of something that should rightfully have been theirs. That's because **they feel entitled** to what they had been in line to receive. This is an almost universal response to someone being "disinherited". This is also the way Satan feels, regarding what God took away from him.

Now God had threatened to "disinherit" Israel at the time of Moses. Moses interceded for Israel, and God relented and did not destroy them and God also did not disinherit them at that time. But about 750 years later, when God sent both the House of Israel and then the House of Judah into national captivities in foreign lands, **at that time God did disinherit Israel**. The "inheritance" that was taken away from Israel at that time has since then been given by God to the Church of God.

The "inheritance" God took away from Israel when God "divorced" them was that the nations of Israel should have been the sole providers for all the remaining places still open for the 144,000 comprising the first resurrection. **That inheritance has been taken away** from the physical nations of Israel and given to the Church of God, with the result that the remaining places for the 144,000 can be filled by people from all nations, without regard for racial backgrounds.

To get back to Israel at around the time of the national captivities:

All their provocations were manifestations of the people of Israel having hardened their hearts. Tempting God and provoking God are invariably consequences of people hardening their hearts.

When we harden our hearts we have received a self-inflicted mortal wound!

Solomon wrote:

Happy *is* the man that fears always: but **he that hardens** (qashah) **his heart** shall fall into mischief (Hebrew "evil"). (Proverbs 28:14)

He, that being often reprov'd **hardens** (qashah) **his neck**, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. (Proverbs 29:1)

The penalties for hardness of heart very often come **"suddenly"**, totally unexpectedly. They are imposed by God "suddenly" because the time for reasoning with such a person is past. **It never works when we**

try to reason with a hardened heart. Even God cannot reason with a hardened heart.

Coming down to the time of the Kingdom of Judah, just before the Babylonian captivity, God through the prophet Jeremiah repeatedly addressed the hard-hearted attitude of the people of Judah. Judah had become even worse than her northern sister Israel. So God then also "divorced" Judah, by sending them away "out of His house", i.e. out of the land of Israel.

Here are some key statements in this regard from God.

Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but **hardened** (qashah) **their neck**: they did worse than their fathers. (Jeremiah 7:26)

But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but **made their neck stiff** (qashah), that they might not hear, nor receive instruction. (Jeremiah 17:23)

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because **they have hardened** (qashah) **their necks**, that they might not hear my words. (Jeremiah 19:15)

A hard or stiff neck is a reference to hardening the heart, setting the mind to stubbornly resist God, challenging God to do something about it. It is a grievous provocation of God. Jeremiah's warnings were given at the time when the northern ten tribes had already been carried out of the land. And at that time **everybody in Judah could see** that a time of national captivity to Babylon was very imminent, as Jeremiah kept telling them. It was like the people of Judah were staring down the barrel of a cocked gun.

The outwardly visible signs of imminent destruction didn't stop the people from remaining hard-hearted and stiff-necked in their relationship with God. And so before the end of the Book of Jeremiah the Kingdom of Judah had also been carried away into a national captivity.

The point for us to take note of is that hardening our hearts is almost always the underlying cause for all forms of disobedience to and rejection of God's laws (excluding sins of ignorance, etc.).

So from the Old Testament we can put together the following picture:

The hardening of the heart refers to **a rebellious setting of the mind** to go contrary to God's laws and instructions. A hard heart is **seldom deterred** by the threat of severe penalties. A hard heart **will not listen to reason** and to logic. It is stubborn and **extremely selfish**. It is also cruel and fierce. A hardened heart resolutely resists teachings and instructions and corrections, as we saw in Proverbs 29:1.

A hardened heart **doesn't care what is right and what is wrong**. It knowingly opposes God, **challenging God** to go ahead and do something. And so a hardened heart will end up facing sudden destruction. A hardened heart expresses the attitude of Satan. A hardened heart will never acknowledge that it is wrong.

And therefore human beings who develop a hardened heart in their response to God **must be annihilated by God**. There is no other option.

So far we have just looked at the Old Testament. So now let's consider some instructions recorded in the New Testament. Let's start by looking at various New Testament Greek words that apply to "hard" and to "hardness".

NEW TESTAMENT GREEK WORDS

In the text of the New Testament we have the following family of Greek words that refer to hardness of heart.

- 1) The adjective "**skleros**" means: dry, arid, hard, rough. This is one basic word that is used to refer to "**hard**".
- 2) From "skleros" we then get the word "**sklerokardia**", which means "**hardness of heart**".
- 3) We also get the verbal noun "**sklerotes**", which means "**hardness**".
- 4) Then we also get the adjective "**sklerotrachelos**", which literally means "a hard neck", and so it is appropriately translated as "**stiff-necked**".
- 5) And then we get the verb "**skleruno**", which means "**to make hard, harden**".

We'll look at how all of these 5 Greek words are used. They all form one family of words. And then there is another family of Greek words, that consists of just 2 words. They are:

- 1) The Greek verb "**poroo**". It was formed from the word "poros", which was apparently **a kind of stone**. And so "poroo" means: "**to harden by covering with a callus**, to cover with a thick skin". This Greek verb also clearly means "to harden". Note this, because this verb is **mistranslated** in our English Bibles.
- 2) The Greek noun "**porosis**", which means: the covering with a callus, i.e. hardness. This noun is **also mistranslated** in our English Bibles.

So, as we can see, we are **basically dealing with two different Greek words**: "skleros" and "poroo". The other 5 words are related to these two basic words. Both of these basic words refer to "hard" or "make hard" or "harden".

Before looking at the Scriptures in which all these words are used, let's notice an interesting reversal in our English translations.

In **Old Testament Hebrew** we find that two Hebrew words which **do not mean** "harden, hard", etc. **are mistranslated** as "harden".

In **New Testament Greek**, on the other hand, we find that two Greek words that **do mean** "to make hard, hardness" **are sometimes mistranslated** by words other than "hard". This is like in the Old Testament people are desperately looking for some words for "to harden", while in the New Testament they try to disguise the meaning "to harden" for certain words. Interesting, isn't it?

NEW TESTAMENT MISTRANSLATIONS

The Greek verb "poroo" and the Greek noun "porosis" both clearly refer to "harden" and to "hardness". That meaning is unmistakable from the literal meaning "to cover with a callus".

So when "poroo" is **twice** translated as "**blinded**", then we are dealing with mistranslations! "Poroo" does not mean "blinded". The New Testament Greek verb for "blinded" is "tuphloo", and all biblical scholars know this. And so there are various correct translations for these verses. But to render "poroo"

as blinded is a deliberate deception! It misleads us!

Here is the first of these two verses that are commonly mistranslated:

What then? Israel has not obtained that which he seeks for; but the election has obtained it, and the rest **were blinded** ("poroo"). (Romans 11:7)

That translation is garbage!

Paul never said that the rest "were blinded". Had Paul wanted to say that they "were blinded", then he would have used the verb "tuphloo" and not the verb "poroo". But Paul didn't do that! Do you understand why this is a serious mistranslation?

If the people were really "blinded", then it's not their own fault, and then it is not their own doing. If they "were blinded", then they couldn't help rejecting the truth. The translation "were blinded" is nothing more than a **spiritual tranquilizer**, like spiritual Valium. This translation is a fulfillment of Isaiah 30:10, which says: "... **speak unto us smooth things**, prophesy deceits".

Paul didn't say "and the rest were blinded"! What Paul really said was "and **the rest are hardened**"! If they were only "blinded", then they are the helpless victims. But if they "are hardened", then **they are the culprits**, because they themselves are responsible for being hardened.

To refer back to the previous article, Paul's statement here is kind of like expressing in Greek the intended meaning of the hiphil stem in Hebrew. The rest were hardened in the same way that Pharaoh was hardened; they themselves were responsible for becoming hardened.

The mistranslation "were blinded" creates a completely false impression, one of no culpability. That is wrong! So let's face facts, and let's recognize that **the Old Testament Israelites themselves were responsible for hardening their hearts**. It wasn't something that God supposedly did to them, and supposedly for their own benefit. That line of reasoning is sheer nonsense.

Romans 11:7 is correctly translated as "the rest were hardened" in the ASV, ERV, the Lexham English Bible, the 1869 Noyes Translation, RSV, NRSV, etc. The mistranslation "blinded" can be traced back to Jerome's Latin Vulgate Version, which reads "excaecati sunt". This means "are blinded". So the KJV translators once again followed the wrong lead of the Latin Vulgate rather than following the correct Greek text.

Here is something Jesus Christ said during His ministry.

For **this people's heart is waxed gross**, and **their ears are dull of hearing**, and **their eyes they have closed**; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. (Matthew 13:15)

It wasn't God's doing that "the people's heart is waxed gross"; it wasn't God's doing that "their ears are dull of hearing"; and it wasn't God's doing that "their eyes they have shut". No, **all these things were done by the people themselves**, without any kind of prompting from God. And so the people who closed their eyes, shut their ears, and hardened their hearts are themselves responsible for having been "broken off the natural olive tree" (see Romans 11:17-23). And the only way they'll be grafted back into "a good olive tree" is **if they stop "abiding in unbelief"** (see verse 23).

"The rest were blinded" creates a completely false picture. Let's now look at the second Scripture with this mistranslation in the KJV.

But their minds **were blinded** ("poroo"): for until this day remains the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which *veil* is done away in Christ. (2 Corinthians 3:14)

That too is a very misleading translation. Paul did not say "their minds were blinded". He did not use the Greek verb "tuphloo". Paul really said "their minds were hardened", or we could even say "**their minds became calloused**". The above comments also apply to this verse.

And this verse is correctly translated as "their minds were hardened" by all the translations that also translated Romans 11:7 correctly (i.e. ASV, RSV, etc.).

Now let's look at the two verses where the noun "porosis" is mistranslated as 'blindness'. Here is the first verse.

For I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own conceits; that **blindness** ("porosis") in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. (Romans 11:25)

That translation is also garbage!

Greek nouns for "**blindness**" are words like "**tuphlose**" and "**tuphlotēs**", and these nouns are **never used in the New Testament**, not even once. So when you see the English noun "blindness" in two verses of the New Testament (KJV), then you need to realize that you are dealing with mistranslations.

In the above verse the expression "blindness in part is happened to Israel" should correctly be translated as "**hardness has happened to a part of Israel**". That's right! It has happened to the overwhelmingly greater part of Israel, because they have hardened their hearts, shut their ears and closed their eyes. It's a matter of cause and effect.

The versions mentioned earlier (ASV, RSV, etc.) all translate this correctly as "a hardening" or as "hardness", instead of the KJV mistranslation "blindness". The wrong translation "blindness" is once again based on the Latin Vulgate Version, which reads "caecitas" (Latin for "blindness"), instead of correctly reading "durtia" (Latin for "hardness").

The KJV mistranslation "blindness in part is happened to Israel" makes it sound like the people involved don't carry any responsibility for their condition. It sounds like they are helpless victims. That is completely false!

The real problem for the great majority of the people of Israel is hardness of heart towards the true God, not blindness. **They are callous towards God**. And that is precisely what Paul said in Romans 11:25.

Let's look at the next verse that is also mistranslated in the KJV.

Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of **the blindness** ("porosis") of their heart: (Ephesians 4:18)

This is one more very bad mistranslation in the KJV, though it is translated correctly in the ASV, RSV, YLT, etc.

In this verse Paul is speaking about all of humanity, not just about Israel, and here Paul also did not use a Greek word that means "blindness". No, here Paul used the word "porosis", which means "hardness".

The KJV false expression "the blindness of their heart" attempts to absolve the people of all

responsibility. They then become innocent victims of God's actions. But Paul didn't say "the blindness of their heart". Paul very clearly and unmistakably said "because of **the hardness of their heart**", or "because of the callousness of their heart". And when this is correctly translated, then this statement implies **accountability before God**.

The Greek words "poroo" and "porosis" have nothing to do with being blind; they have everything to do with being hard and callous. And many translations freely recognize this.

Let's now start by looking at the Scriptures where these two Greek words "poroo" and "porosis" are translated correctly, even in the KJV.

CORRECT KJV TRANSLATIONS OF "POROO" AND "POROSIS"

After Jesus Christ had walked on water and then come into the boat, Mark made the following observation.

For they considered not *the miracle* of the loaves: for **their heart was hardened** ("poroo"). (Mark 6:52)

Here the KJV translators translated "poroo" correctly as "hardened". Their hearts were assuredly "hardened". They were not "blinded" because they were the people who actually **"saw"** all of Jesus Christ's miracles.

Next, after Jesus Christ warned His disciples to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod" (Mark 8:15), the disciples interpreted this to be a hint at their neglect to bring enough food with them. In response to this completely wrong deduction Jesus Christ then said:

And when Jesus knew *it*, he said unto them, Why reason you, because you have no bread? perceive you not yet, neither understand? **have you your heart yet hardened** ("poroo")? (Mark 8:17)

In effect, Jesus Christ asked His own disciples: are your hearts also still calloused? Again, this is the correct translation for "poroo". It shows that "poroo" does not mean "blind". If (theoretically) His disciples had their hearts "blinded", then they couldn't have done anything about it, because **we can never "un-blind" ourselves**. Removing blindness from us human beings is something that only God can do.

But His disciples had their hearts not "blinded" but "hardened", and that was their own doing. And **they themselves had the ability to cease having hardened hearts**. They themselves had the power, and therefore also the responsibility, to change that situation. And at that point in Mark 8:17 the disciples hadn't done that yet.

Let's also look at where the noun "porosis" is translated correctly in the KJV.

On one Sabbath there was a man with a "withered hand" (Mark 3:1). The hypocritical Pharisees had judged that healing anyone on a Sabbath day was a transgression of the commandment. When Jesus Christ then confronted them directly with the question "is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil, to save life or to kill?", they refused to answer (verse 4).

They couldn't care two hoots about the suffering of the man with the withered hand. All they cared about was their own traditions, and their very twisted interpretations of God's Word. So Mark then tells us:

And when he had looked round about on them **with anger**, being grieved for **the hardness** ("porosis")

of their hearts, he said unto the man, Stretch forth your hand. And he stretched *it* out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. (Mark 3:5)

Notice that how the Pharisees responded made Jesus Christ angry! Now consider this: Jesus Christ would not have become angry if their hearts were "blinded", because then the people couldn't help being blind. Jesus Christ became angry because the people had the power to not harden their hearts. They had the ability to have compassion for the man with the withered hand, but they didn't do that. No, instead they of their own free will hardened their hearts. That hard-heartedness made Jesus Christ angry.

In this context in Mark 3:5 "hardness" is obviously a correct translation for "porosis". And this context also makes clear that **"porosis" definitely does not mean "blindness"**!

Now let's examine some of the verses that use the family of Greek words derived from "skleros".

THE GREEK ADJECTIVE "SKLEROS"

Since "skleros" is the base word from which the other words are derived, let's start with some of the Scriptures that use this word.

Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew You, that You are an **hard** ("skleros") man, reaping where You have not sown, and gathering where You have not strawed: (Matthew 25:24)

This Scripture reveals **a major problem with people who harden their hearts towards God**. Their attitude is one of believing that God is the One who is hard, that God is not really fair, that God expects too much from us. They believe that God is basically selfish, always wanting to get more from others. This one-talent servant was pretty hard-core in his critical view of God. **There is no hope for an attitude that is so critical of God**. And therefore that particular servant is cast "into outer darkness" (Matthew 25:30). He ends up in the lake of fire.

Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard *this*, said, This is an **hard** ("skleros") saying; who can hear it? (John 6:60)

Many of Christ's disciples felt that the total commitment which Jesus Christ required was "hard". They felt it was "hard" to live by the teachings Jesus Christ presented. It was His teachings that they perceived as "hard".

Notice something that Jude said:

To execute judgment upon all, and to convince (convict) all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their **hard** ("skleros") *speeches* which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. (Jude 1:15)

Jude is referring to **people who are critical of God**. Their critical attitude is a manifestation of their hardness of heart towards God. And Christ is not coming "to convince" such people; **He is coming "to convict" such people**.

These verses should suffice to show that "skleros" really does mean "hard". So with this foundation let's consider some of the words that have been formed from "skleros".

THE GREEK NOUN "SKLEROKARDIA"

This Greek compound word consists of "sklero" = "hard", and "kardia" = "heart". This word was coined already before New Testament times from the Hebrew expression for "to harden the heart". The Greek word literally means "hardness of heart". It is used three times in the New Testament.

He said unto them, Moses because of **the hardness of your hearts** ("ten sklerokardian humon") suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. (Matthew 19:8, and also Mark 10:5)

This verse points out one major problem that is caused by hardness of heart. And that problem is this: **hardness of heart makes it utterly impossible to put God's laws and God's intentions into practice!** Hardness of heart always forces the issue in the following way:

Either blot out all those whose hearts are hardened, or modify God's intentions in such a way that the hardness of human hearts will be "accommodated" until God's purposes have been achieved!

Those are the only two options when we are dealing with hardened hearts. Had you understood this? It is either the one course of action or the other.

We need to understand that **most of the laws that were added** to the ten commandments in Old Testament times **are not a reflection of God's real intentions!**

Rather, they are a reflection of God "accommodating" the hardened hearts of human beings in such a way that God's plan for creating the Family of God could continue to unfold, without coming to a screeching halt because of the hardness of human hearts. The centuries before the flood are a vivid example of the hardness of human hearts going berserk!

Establishing "accommodating laws" is precisely what God tells us through the Prophet Ezekiel. In response to the disobedience that resulted from the hardness of heart of the people of Israel, God said:

Wherefore **I gave them also statutes *that were not good*, and judgments whereby they should not live;** (Ezekiel 20:25)

Exactly!

Those "statutes" and "judgments" were given in order to make some "accommodation" for their hardness of heart, **like making allowance for divorce**. But those statutes and judgments are far from expressing God's real intentions. All of those "accommodating statutes and judgments" will be abolished during Jesus Christ's millennial rule. The key in this regard is Jesus Christ's statement **"from the beginning it was not so"**.

Everything that was changed from the way God set it up "at the beginning" of human existence was only changed to "accommodate" the hardness of human hearts. You might want to pause and think about "everything that was changed" to grasp the far-reaching ramifications this statement entails. And during the millennium "all those things that were changed" will no longer be "accommodated".

Can you understand why people whose hearts are hardened must eventually be annihilated? There is no other option. Once God has achieved His goal of building the Family of God, from then onwards God's intentions will never again, in any way whatsoever, be compromised, not even one millionth of an inch. Nobody who in any way even remotely exhibits a hardness of heart will be allowed to continue to exist in God's presence.

That is what Matthew 19:8 reveals to us.

Here is another use of this Greek word.

Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and **hardness of heart** ("sklerokardia"), because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. (Mark 16:14)

Here is another way that hardness of heart manifests itself. When we don't believe the truth, then that is due to us **hardening our hearts towards the truth**. In Mark 16:14 all of the remaining apostles were in the process of coming to real repentance. But they had not yet received God's holy spirit. **They were all still unconverted**. It is one thing for unconverted people to harden their hearts towards various aspects of God's truth. That can still be worked out.

But it is a different matter altogether for someone who has God's spirit (or had God's spirit in the past), meaning someone who is or was converted, to harden their hearts towards any aspects of God's truth. That's a situation that will be final!

When a mind that is or was converted becomes "hardened against God", then that is a final condition. We can sin out of foolishness and on impulse or out of ignorance or out of weakness, and those things can be repented of. But we who are converted cannot harden our hearts against God, **like the one-talent servant did**, and somehow still attain unto salvation. A hardened heart by someone who "was once enlightened" and who had been "a partaker of the holy spirit" (see Hebrews 6:4-6) represents a permanent severance from God, to be permanently cut off from salvation.

So hardness of heart represents the greatest sin of all. Let's move on to the next two Greek words.

THE GREEK WORDS "SKLEROTES" AND "SKLEROTRACHELOS"

The noun "sklerotes" is only used once in the New Testament. It means "hardness".

But after your **hardness** ("sklerotes") and impenitent (i.e. unrepentant) heart treasure up unto yourself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; (Romans 2:5)

Here Paul simply says that a hard heart is an unrepentant heart, and that it is destined to be destroyed in the lake of fire. There are no saving features or attributes for a hardened heart.

The adjective "sklerotrachelos" is also only used once in the New Testament. "Trachelos" is a noun that means "neck". So the adjective "sklerotrachelos" literally means "a hard neck", or, as we would more commonly say in English, "a stiff neck". This adjective means "stiff-necked".

You **stiff-necked** ("sklerotrachelos") and uncircumcised in heart and ears, **you do always resist the holy spirit**: as your fathers *did*, so *do* you. (Acts 7:51)

Stephen was saying these words. He used the word "uncircumcised" to mean "unrepentant". Both "an impenitent heart" and "an uncircumcised heart" refer to "an unrepentant heart", which is also "a hardened heart".

In this verse we have one identifying sign for a hardened heart. **It "always resists the holy spirit"**. What this means in practical terms is that a hardened heart will spontaneously and intuitively take up or

support a position that opposes the truth of God. That's because the unrepentant mind is "enmity against God" (see Romans 8:7).

So when you are dealing with **people who oppose the truth of God**, whether those people are baptized members of some branch of God's Church or not, you are dealing with people who have "a stiff-necked and uncircumcised heart". You need to recognize this.

That's what Acts 7:51 reveals to us.

Opposing the truth of God is always, without fail, a clear sign of a hardened heart. That is one clear way in which a hardened heart will manifest itself.

Let's now look at the last of the Greek words in this particular group.

THE GREEK VERB "SKLERUNO"

This verb is used 6 times in the New Testament, and it means "to harden".

But when divers **were hardened** ("skleruno"), and believed not, but spoke evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. (Acts 19:9)

Here Paul had been reasoning with Jews in the synagogue in Ephesus for about three months. At that point some of the Jews there "were hardened". Those particular Jews were responsible for hardening their minds against the truth that Paul was explaining. Their lack of belief was proof that they had hardened their minds. One common symptom of a hardened heart is that such people will **"speak evil" of the truth they cannot refute.**

Once these hardened attitudes became apparent to Paul, Paul separated himself from those with such attitudes. That is a principle that always needs to be applied: as much as it is possible, we must always separate ourselves from people with hardened hearts, or their hardened attitude will surely affect us in a negative way.

We should also be aware of a statement in Romans 9 that is commonly misunderstood.

Therefore has He mercy on whom He will *have mercy*, and **whom He will He hardens** ("skleruno"). (Romans 9:18)

In the companion article "Did God Harden Pharaoh's Heart?" I have devoted over three pages to explaining Romans 9:18. So I don't want to repeat that explanation here. Here I will just tell you that Paul did not mean to imply that God is actively involved in hardening some peoples' hearts. For a full explanation for Romans 9:18 please refer to that article.

That leaves us with the four times Paul used the verb "skleruno" in the Book of Hebrews. Those verses refer to a quotation from Psalm 95. Let's look at those four verses.

PAUL'S ADMONITIONS TO GOD'S PEOPLE

Paul, the apostle to the non-Israelite nations of the world, wrote **the Book of Hebrews** to the Jews in the Church. Back in Acts 2 all the founding members of the Church were Jews, including Jews from many different parts of the Roman Empire, who had come to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Weeks (i.e. Pentecost).

Those Jews at that time had come into the Church fully expecting Jesus Christ's return, to set up the Kingdom of God, in their own lifetime. They had endured many trials in order to stay faithful to God's calling. They expected Christ's return in the very near future, because that is what the apostles taught them in those early years of the Church. They pinned all their hopes and expectations on Christ returning in their lifetime.

But almost three decades had passed since Christ's resurrection, and He had still not returned. Jesus Christ was without question "**their first love**" (see Revelation 2:4). Of the **5,000 Jews** that were baptized by the time of Acts 4:4, the majority would have had some exposure to Jesus Christ's three-and-one-half-year ministry. Most of them had very likely seen Jesus Christ at least once during His ministry, even though they only came to repentance and into God's Church at some point after Christ's resurrection.

Jesus Christ was "their first love" in a more direct way than can be said for people in any subsequent era of God's Church.

Now by the late 50's to early 60's A.D. many of these Jewish members of God's Church started to become disillusioned with Jesus Christ. They questioned whether He would really return as He had said. Put a different way, many of these Jewish members were beginning to "leave their first love". They were becoming discouraged.

This was a trend that the Apostle Paul recognized. So Paul wanted to help them. He felt great empathy and compassion for "his kinsmen according to the flesh" (see Romans 9:3). Because many Jews in the Church at that time were quite critical of Paul, therefore he did not even identify himself in the Epistle to the Hebrews. He wanted the message to speak for itself, without his name arousing instant prejudice in the minds of some Jewish readers.

If we want to identify Paul's main purpose in this Letter to the Hebrews, it is this: Paul in essence told the Hebrews: **please don't walk away from Jesus Christ, your first love!** Everything in Hebrews is aimed at this specific message. This is the letter that explains and expounds Jesus Christ's supreme position in God's plan (obviously supreme under God the Father). This is the letter that warns of the dire consequences for walking away from God's truth. This is the letter that expounds on the vital importance of faith in Jesus Christ and in His sacrifice for us.

Everything in the Book of Hebrews says: don't leave Jesus Christ, your first love!

Paul did everything he could do to help his Jewish countrymen in the Church. The sad addendum is that roughly 30 years later Jesus Christ said to this very same group of Jewish Church-members: "I have somewhat against you, because **you have left your first love**" (Revelation 2:4). This tells us that Paul's fervent appeals in the Book of Hebrews had not really achieved their purpose. Many Jews had left the Church, even after Paul had written the Epistle of Hebrews to them.

That is some background to the statements we will now look at.

Harden ("skleruno") not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: (Hebrews 3:8)

This is the quotation from Psalm 95:8 which we have already examined. As I said in that context, so I will say again:

To harden our hearts is quite possibly **the single most dangerous attitude** any human being could ever adopt!

Let's keep in mind to whom Paul was addressing this exhortation. He was speaking to the founding members of the New Testament Church of God, men and women who had been in God's Church for decades.

Normally we might expect some repetition to show that something is really important. But Paul states this warning to not harden our hearts **four times** in a very short space. It was extremely important to Paul that he needed to very strongly warn the Jews in the Church, and by extension all members of God's Church throughout the ages, against hardening their hearts. Here are the other three statements.

But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; **lest any of you be hardened** ("skleruno") through the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:13)

While it is said, To day if you will hear his voice, **harden** ("skleruno") **not your hearts**, as in the provocation. (Hebrews 3:15)

Again, he limits a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if you will hear his voice, **harden** ("skleruno") **not your hearts**. (Hebrews 4:7)

Today we live in an age when God's Church has splintered into dozens of different groups. **How did that happen?** Well, one contributing factor today is identical to the conditions that applied to the Hebrews, to whom Paul wrote these warnings.

Since the early 1960's, if not earlier, the people in God's Church have been looking forward to the second coming of Jesus Christ. Many pinned their hopes on Jesus Christ returning during their lifetime. But many amongst us have died, and Jesus Christ has still not returned. Further, many people made foolish decisions which affected their lives in major ways, because they believed we only had a few more years to go before Jesus Christ would return and set up the Kingdom of God.

We today are not that much different from the Hebrews who very badly needed the advice Paul gave them in that letter. We today need that exact same advice. It is to God's people today, who are scattered every which way, that Jesus Christ says:

"Today if you will hear his voice, **harden not your hearts**, as in the provocation."

Today multiple thousands of people have indeed hardened their hearts, and turned their backs on God's truth and on God's laws and God's ways. Where once we were many, now we are few. It is to us today that Jesus Christ says:

"Hold that fast which you have, that no man take your crown" (Revelation 3:11).

People who harden their hearts are not holding fast. Today multiple thousands have not held fast. They have let go of many truths of God. And there is great pressure on all of us to likewise let go of at least some things.

We must resist that pressure.

Here is what a hardened heart looks like.

THE SYMPTOMS OF A HARDENED HEART

It is one thing for us to be told "harden not your heart". But that's not a very tangible statement. Exactly what is it that we must do or not do in order to prevent our hearts from becoming hardened?

Here are some pointers in this regard, with a certain amount of overlap between them.

- 1) Hardness of heart shows itself in an unwillingness to listen to reason, and **an unwillingness to acknowledge truth that we cannot refute**.
- 2) Going a step further, knowingly **arguing against facts** that we just don't like, because they contradict our own position, is strong evidence for a hardened heart.
- 3) Likewise, **deliberately ignoring facts** we don't like, pretending that those facts don't exist, is evidence of a hardened heart.
- 4) Instead of disproving those Scriptures that expose errors in our beliefs, **attempting to find "other Scriptures"** to somehow nullify the Scriptures we cannot disprove, is evidence of a hardened heart. Other Scriptures are great, but they can't nullify verses we just don't like. And a teachable heart will never attempt to use "other Scriptures" to justify ignoring verses that challenge our own personal position.
- 5) An attitude that **resists teachings, instructions and correction** is a hardened attitude. A hardened heart is self-willed and will not listen to correction.
- 6) **A refusal to change** when a long-held belief has been irrefutably proved to be wrong is the expression of a hardened heart.
- 7) **A casual approach towards God**, one lacking respect, is evidence of a hardened heart.
- 8) **A downright critical view of God** (like Jonah) is powerful evidence for a hardened heart.
- 9) **Finding fault with any laws of God** reveals a hardened heart.
- 10) **Seeking ways to get around any laws of God** (like the Pharisees did), when trying to get something we desperately want, is a manifestation of a hardened heart.
- 11) **Attempting to discredit people** who show us where we are wrong, because we cannot prove wrong the facts they presented to us, is clear evidence of a hardened heart.
- 12) An **unwillingness to forgive** people who have wronged us is evidence of a hardened heart. We don't necessarily have to like such people, but we are not to harbor any resentment against them.
- 13) **Speaking evil of any truth of God** is evidence of a hardened heart.
- 14) Jesus Christ very clearly said "my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). So any assertion that any of **God's true teachings are "hard"** is not true, and it is in fact an expression of a hardened heart.

15) In any dispute or debate **spontaneously arguing for the side that opposes God's laws** is clear evidence of a hardened heart.

These are some of the ways in which a hardened heart will manifest itself in our circumstances today. What should not surprise us is when people with such attitudes are "suddenly" punished by God. That's what Solomon has told us.

Let's be sure that we ourselves don't become ensnared in hardening our hearts in one of these many different ways.

Frank W Nelte